

Fire Line



News from Your Emergency Service Provider

In the spirit of our tradition, we strive for excellence, respectfully serving all with pride, honor and compassion.

Hazardous Materials Team - One of the Resources of the District

Approximately 15 years ago, the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District formed a Hazardous Materials Division to meet the growing need for a specialized team to handle the increasing complexities of emergency calls that deal with hazardous materials. As of 2006, the Team consists of 26 firefighters who have received approximately 200 hours of additional training in identification and mitigation of incidents involving hazardous solids, liquids, and gases.

The personnel that are part of the Hazardous Materials Team also function as line fire suppression personnel within the District. In addition to hundreds of hours of yearly fire suppression training they are required to participate in specialized Haz Mat training a minimum of 32 hours yearly in order to remain an active member of the Team. Each member has an area of specialization and is responsible for maintaining that expertise as part of the program.

Why have a Haz Mat Team?

The San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District responds to approximately 140 hazardous materials calls per year. Not each of these requires deployment of the Haz Mat Team. However, the fact that the District has the personnel and equipment to respond to these risks provides a high level of protection to our communities. The 680 freeway is an example of a continuing potential risk for hazardous material incidents.

Hazardous materials calls involve a greater than normal risk to health and the environment. It is sometimes necessary to mitigate these incidents with special equipment and techniques for which only a Hazardous Materials Technician or Specialist is trained.

Whether it is saving property or the environment by properly handling hazardous materials incidents, or actually saving someone from detrimental

MISSION STATEMENT

The Hazardous Materials Division exists to reduce the impact of Hazardous Materials Incidents on life, the environment, and property.

health effects of a large chemical spill, the Hazardous Materials Team is here to protect our community. Also, in most cases a timely response and mitigation of a hazardous materials incident can save thousands of dollars in post incident clean up costs.

Haz Mat Team Capabilities

Hazardous Materials Teams are classified into 3 categories. Type III Teams deal with known solid and liquid chemicals. Type II Teams deal with unknown solid, liquid, and gaseous chemicals. Finally, Type I Teams have the same capabilities as a Type II Team, plus additional training and equipment to deal with weapons of mass destruction incidents. San Ramon Valley Fire is equipped and trained to function as a

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The graphics on the truck are custom airbrush work by on-duty District Firefighters.

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Training to be a Firefighter

Second in a Series of Articles by Fire Chief Craig Bowen

In the last *Fire Line* issue we reviewed how a person goes about becoming a firefighter. This issue will examine what a person is expected to successfully experience once they become a firefighter, specifically as a member of the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District.



The communities protected by this Fire District attract career firefighters from many other agencies as well as people new to the job. As a general rule, all new hires in this District must possess a Firefighter 1 training record which adheres to State Fire Marshal's Office requirements, as well as Paramedic Accreditation. Most new hires also possess either an Associates or Bachelors Degree, accompanied by a variety of specialized certifications such as Rescue and Hazardous Materials Training.

Despite the high levels of training new recruits must possess prior to receiving a position in this Fire District, they still receive extensive training after they are hired. The goal is to take people from a wide variety of individual backgrounds and experiences, and transform them into a team that is aligned in terms of focus on customer service, values, and performance techniques.

To achieve these goals, new hires are subject to an eighteen month probationary period, which includes many

evaluation steps, before they are considered a permanent employee.

Academy

For the initial thirteen to sixteen weeks, new firefighters enter an advanced fire academy. This academy covers as many as twenty-eight different career topics. Each week during this intense training period every academy cadet is evaluated and provided individual performance coaching.

On-The-Job Training

Once the new firefighters graduate from the advanced fire academy, they are assigned to shift-work and emergency response crews who provide



mentoring and additional one-on-one training. During this period, which lasts approximately twelve months, each new firefighter is expected to have a skills-book signed off by qualified personnel. The skills-book covers training previously given, as well as new material ranging from District familiarization to secondary job skills. In addition, the new firefighter must pass an examination every three months. Each examination focuses on specific topics such as medical skills, firefighting skills, District familiarization, administrative duties, rescue, hazardous materials, etc.

Within the first several months, new firefighters must also pass all Contra Costa County Paramedic requirements,

and ultimately obtain the proper credentials which will allow them to work as a single paramedic on any emergency response unit in the District.

All of these experiences occur within the first twelve to fourteen months of employment.

Probationary Crew Member

For the remainder of the eighteen month probationary period, the new firefighter works as a crew member and is evaluated regarding his/her contributions and alignment with the expectations of this agency and the communities being served.

At the end of the eighteen months, the successful new firefighter joins the team of professional, permanent employees serving our area in a manner that provides the highest level of service possible.



Due to the District's very detailed hiring process, I am happy to report that over 96% of newly hired firefighters pass this arduous eighteen month probation and continue working for this Fire District, providing, on the average, more than twenty-five years of dedicated service.

Craig Bowen
Fire Chief

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Type II Team; however, the actual Office of Emergency Services (OES) rating is pending. This means the team is capable of making entries into a hazardous materials environment with the highest level of chemical protective clothing.

This Type II Team utilizes a state-of-the-art emergency response vehicle which was purchased earlier this year, with monies available through a Homeland Security Grant process. This vehicle and an identical one assigned to the Richmond Fire Department were designed by San Ramon Valley Fire Haz Mat personnel who participated as the design team for this particular grant purchase. The resources that these vehicles provide for incidents anywhere in the County are extremely

valuable to both the District's and Richmond's Haz Mat Teams' effectiveness.

The District's Haz Mat Team provides assistance on a wide variety of calls:

- **Sick Buildings**
- **Mercury Spills (any size)**
- **Abandoned Chemicals**
- **Carbon Monoxide Calls**
- **Uncontrolled Fuel Leaks**
- **Natural Gas Leaks**
- **Undetermined Odor Investigations**
- **Structure Fires**
- **Household Chemical Issues**
- **Pipeline Ruptures**
- **Vehicle Accidents Involving Tankers**
- **Industrial Accidents Involving Chemicals**

Some of the above may seem benign, but each could have serious consequences.

It is the responsibility of the Haz Mat Team to assess and mitigate these risks.

All Hazardous Materials Team members are EMT's or Paramedics, and the Haz Mat Response Vehicle is fully equipped with advanced life support supplies. The District is currently researching the possibility of also equipping the Team to provide an expanded scope of treatment specific to hazardous materials incidents (the Tox Medic Program).

The San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District's Haz Mat Team is staffed by dedicated personnel headquartered at Station 35, on Silver Oak Lane in Danville, as well as other members strategically placed throughout the District.

Volunteer and Reserve Firefighters are Important Contributors to the District's Protection Capabilities

On February 18, 2006, the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District welcomed two new Volunteer Firefighters and twenty new Reserve Firefighters to the District. Families and friends participated in a badge pinning ceremony at the Fire District's Administration Building in San Ramon.

TRADITIONAL VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

District Volunteer Firefighters respond to calls in the Morgan Territory area and are considered "Traditional" Volunteer Firefighters. Their geographic location places them in the position of first responders to fires and medical emergencies and they mitigate the emergencies until support can arrive. They participate in training sessions twice monthly and are also available for mutual aid responses within the District.

RESERVE FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM

The Reserve Firefighter Program is a new concept to the District. Formerly known as the "Station 36 Volunteers" and operating out of Station 36 on Tassajara Road, the Reserve Program's goal is to create a pool of highly trained personnel who are capable of assisting the District's full-time personnel in meeting the operational needs of the District. Secondly, the program creates a pool of potential candidates for hiring as full-time professional firefighter/paramedics. Several of the current full-time firefighters in the District participated in this program.



The Reserve Firefighters will be assigned on a rotating basis to Stations 31, 32, 34, and 39 with a six month rotation between these stations. The Reserve Firefighters' primary duties are as follows:

- Perform under direction of Company Officers at structure and wildland fires, hazardous materials incidents, and all other related emergencies.
- Enhance fire suppression productivity at incidents; thereby allowing first line fire companies to return to available status and station coverage.
- Under supervision, respond to and perform emergency procedures commensurate with state levels of training for Firefighter I and Emergency Care (Basic First Aid and EMT-Defibrillator).
- Offer an additional resource for use at emergency incidents at the discretion of the Company Officer, Incident Commander, or District Chief Officer.

More information about these programs can be found on the District's website at www.srvfire.ca.gov.

Are You Ready? CERT Program Prepares Citizens for Emergencies

Today, being prepared and trained for a disaster means far more than it did just a few years ago. All we have to do is look at the natural catastrophes that have occurred around the world recently. Today, being trained means that you, members of your family, and members of your community will be prepared for anything nature throws your way. That means less panic and better decision making, as well as self-reliant individuals working together to ensure everyone's safety.

The Need

CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) is based on a simple observation: in major emergencies professional emergency services are overloaded immediately. For example, the San Ramon Valley has 41 Firefighters and approximately 15 sworn Police Officers on duty on any given day. That is approximately 60 first responders for a community of 150,000 people, which is adequate for normal emergencies, rescues, and crimes. However, if a mass emergency traps or injures just 2% of the inhabitants, there are instantly 3,000 victims, many with major injuries. Telephone lines and connections may fail from overload. Roads, electricity, and other services may fail, hampering emergency services and interfering with fuel and material supplies. The benefit of having trained volunteers to assist our local first responders is quite clear.

If only professionals responded to an emergency that created 3,000 victims, three quarters of the victims could die while waiting for rescue. Most of these deaths could be prevented by simple rescue and first-aid procedures. In these environments, CERT volunteers are far more effective than untrained civilians. With less than 40 hours of training, a volunteer emergency responder becomes qualified to perform about 95% of needed emergency services. This means that 95% of the rescues, life-saving triage, and first-aid procedures can be completed in the "golden day," the first 24 hours when rescues and first-aid are most likely to succeed. In a major emergency, the community will require mass emergency services. Although amateurs are not able to work as skillfully as professionals, they can do a lot.

The Program

The CERT Program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can

assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately

available to help. CERT members are also encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking an active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community.

CERT classes are held one day a week for six weeks, generally on Thursday nights, from 6:00 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Each class offers students the opportunity to actively participate during hands-on portions, culminating with a drill on the last day that incorporates what students have learned. The classes take place at the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District Administration Office, at 1500 Bollinger Canyon Road, San Ramon. The first CERT class ended on March 23, 2006. (For those of you who completed our 3-Day PLAN program, we are looking into how to convert that time toward the required CERT time. Check our website for updates and classes.)

To sign up for CERT, visit our website at www.srvfire.ca.gov. For questions and requests regarding CERT, please email Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Danielle Bell at dbell@srvfire.ca.gov. If you don't have access to the internet, you may contact Danielle at (925) 838-6697. Due to the high interest in the CERT program by residents, email is the preferred method of communication. In addition, the CERT program does necessitate use of email for contact purposes. Visit the website to read more about CERT and view the current schedule of classes. **In your email, please include which class you would like to attend, as well as your physical address.**

Citizens will be selected based upon geographic locations. The San Ramon Valley will be divided by areas. The goal is to get as many people trained from different areas within the San Ramon Valley as possible. For example, we would like to have at least one person trained per community instead of 50 in one area. This will enable the entire Valley to be prepared, rather

than just one specific neighborhood. You may be placed on a CERT waiting list for 3-9 months depending on your location. Future classes will be posted on the District website. You will receive an email reply within 72 hours of your request. Please be patient as this is a new program and we are in the beginning stages. We are very excited to bring this effective program to our community.



Preventing Wildfires is Everyone's Job

As we near the end of this very rainy season, we see an increase in vegetation growth. When this new growth dries out, there exists a fire hazard not only for the property owner, but to the surrounding community as well.

It is the responsibility of each property owner to ensure that their property is fire safe and that it complies with Fire District Exterior Hazard Abatement Standards.

Wildfires often begin unnoticed, and they can spread quickly, igniting brush, trees, and homes. Here are some things you can do which will not only prevent wildfires, but also promote fire safety in your community:

- Report hazardous conditions that could cause a wildfire.
- Teach children about fire safety. Keep matches out of their reach.
- Plan escape routes away from your home—by car and by foot.
- Make sure that fire vehicles can get to your home.
- Clearly mark driveway entrances and display your address.



PROTECT YOUR HOME:

- ☐ Regularly clean roof and gutters.
- ☐ Install smoke detectors in each level of your home, and check them monthly.
- ☐ Design and landscape your home with wildfire safety in mind. Select materials and plants that can help contain fire rather than fuel it. Use fire resistant or non-combustible materials on the roof and exterior structure of the dwelling.
- ☐ Plant fire-resistant shrubs and trees. For example, hardwood trees are less flammable than pine, evergreen, eucalyptus or fir trees.
- ☐ Clear all flammable vegetation from around your home (150 ft. safety zone).
- ☐ Prune tree branches and shrubs within 15 ft. of a stovepipe or chimney outlet.
- ☐ Ask the power company to clear branches away from power lines.
- ☐ Place fireplace and grill ashes in a metal bucket, soak in water for two days, then bury the cold ashes in soil.
- ☐ Store gasoline, oily rags and other flammable materials in approved safety cans. Place cans in a safe location away from the base of buildings.
- ☐ Stack firewood at least 100 feet away from your home.

This year, a June date (yet to be determined) will be the deadline for Exterior Hazard Abatement (previously known as “weed abatement”). For a copy of District standards, please visit our website at www.srvfire.ca.gov or call 925-838-6600. Let's all do our part to make our community fire safe.

WATCH FOR RED LIGHTS IN FRONT OF FIRE STATIONS

On a safety note, we would like to remind the citizens of the Valley to be aware of the traffic control signals located in front of several of the District Fire Stations. Normally, the signals will show a blinking yellow light. When a crew responds to an emergency, a button is activated that will change the signal to red for a short period of time. Drivers are required to stop, just as they would at any red signal light. These lights are in place to facilitate a rapid response and to provide for the safety of the citizens, as well as the emergency personnel. It has been brought to our attention that some drivers do not seem to be aware that these lights exist and frequently ignore them. A number of accidents have occurred as a result. An area of particular concern is the traffic signal located on Stone Valley Road in Alamo, in front of Station 32.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Use these numbers, NOT 911, when calling from cell phones.

FIRE

San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District
(925) 838-6691

AMBULANCE

San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District
(925) 838-6691

SHERIFF

Contra Costa Sheriff
(925) 646-2441

POLICE

Danville Police
(925) 820-2144

San Ramon Police
(925) 228-8282

STATE HIGHWAY PATROL
(707) 551-4100

ROP Offers a Fire Science Class in San Ramon

The Fire Science portion of the Regional Occupational Program [ROP] started this year at California High School in San Ramon. The program follows the firefighter curriculum as defined by the State Fire Marshal's Office. On the block schedule, the class meets on M-W-F or T-Th, on alternating weeks.

Team leader, Captain Ken Johnson has organized a cadre of three other instructors to cover the program dates through the school year. Captain Paul Taylor, Firefighter/Paramedic Greg Kurtz, and Inspector Darrell Jones have blended their unique individual experiences to provide a complete picture of the modern fire service. Students enjoy the variety of teaching styles and information which this brings to the classroom.

Captain Johnson and Firefighter/Paramedic Kurtz have each worked

at several smaller departments and can address the challenges new firefighters/paramedics encounter in smaller organizations. Fire Inspector Jones presents instruction from the Fire Prevention perspective. Captain Taylor brings recent Training Division experience to help the potential future firefighters gain insight into the rigors of the testing process.

The current thirty students have chosen this class as an elective and though this is a rigorous program, they stay involved in the program by choice. For those entering the community college fire science program, a long term benefit of the ROP program is that successful completion of the ROP Fire Science class earns credits towards completion of the Fire Science 50 class. This program is also serving the entire community by providing a pool of potential firefighters for the future.



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**Helpful Information from
Your Local Fire District**